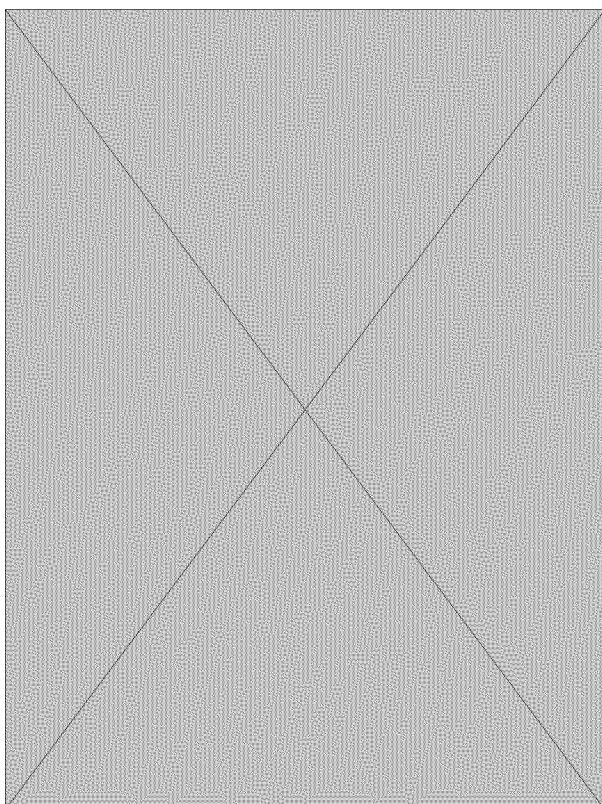


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**Subject:** Officials: EPA mishandled Silverton mine pollution discharge

# Officials: EPA mishandled Silverton mine pollution discharge

By Dan Schwartz The Daily Times  
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This photo from the La Plata County, Colo., website shows mine pollution released into the Animas River from a location above Silverton, Colo. The photo was taken at a spot north of Durango, Colo. (Courtesy La Plata County, Colo.)

AZTEC — State and local officials blasted the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in a briefing in Aztec this morning over its handling of a dam that burst in southwest Colorado Wednesday and released water contaminated by a mine into the Animas River.

"We haven't even been able to confirm what the levels of contamination are on the river," New Mexico Environment Department Cabinet Secretary Ryan Flynn said.

An EPA team was working at the Gold King Mine above Silverton, Colo., at about 10:40 a.m. Wednesday, and they disturbed a dam of loose rock allowing the release an estimated 1 million gallons of mustard-colored water, according to state and local officials.

Flynn said domestic well users within about a mile of the Animas River should have their wells tested before using the

water. He also encouraged people to avoid direct contact with the water until the state environment department says its safe.

Flynn said the mine is a Super Fund Site, meaning the site contains significant pollution. Iron and zinc are the primary known pollutants in the water — but it also probably contains heavy metals, such as lead, and mercury, he said. But the EPA has not told the state environment department, the New Mexico Office of the State Engineer nor local officials how harmful the waste is, officials said.

And the EPA did not inform the environment department of the spill until about 9:40 a.m. Thursday — almost 24 hours after it happened, Flynn said. State Engineer Tom Blaine and San Juan County Emergency Manager Don Cooper also said in the briefing that the EPA has handled the emergency poorly.

The mine waste surged into a creek in Silverton, Colo., on Wednesday and then flowed into the Animas River. At the time of the Friday morning briefing, the plume of orange pollution was 5 miles north of the state line. No EPA officials attended the briefing.